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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS #37: LEONEL FERNANDEZ AND
"FAILED STATES"

REF: 05 SANTO DOMINGO 3946

[11](#). (SBU) Following is number 37 in our series on Leonel
Fernandez's first year in office:

Leonel Fernandez and "Failed States"

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The "Failed States Index" published in the July/August issue of Foreign Policy provoked a torrent of commentary in the Dominican Republic throughout July and August, much of it knee-jerk reactions and hot expressions of offended national pride. The Dominican Republic appears as number 19 on a list of 60 "insecure states, with varying degrees of vulnerability to widespread civil conflict," based on a survey of tens of thousands of media sources in 2003-2004, analyzed for 12 social, economic, political, and military indicators. Haiti, ranked number 10, and Colombia, ranked 14, are judged more vulnerable than the Dominican Republic, while Venezuela, number 22, is slightly less so.

President Leonel Fernandez came out swinging, evoking and denouncing far-fetched negative implications. Extemporizing an address to a conference on July 13 to launch his national anti-corruption strategy, Fernandez dealt only briefly with the main theme and then plunged headlong into the "failed states" issue. "We don't deserve that label," he asserted. "The fact of having political volatility in a country, that there is some instability. . . to say that it is a failed state, which means a state in collapse or to say it more clearly a nonexistent state, seems to me an exaggerated characterization." A judgment with which we would agree, but the article doesn't go that far. Fernandez said he would instruct Dominican embassies worldwide to engage in corrective public diplomacy.

Fernandez plunged into the enduring Dominican phobia: "And because they link us with Haiti because it is also a failed state, we want to say that there are no common solutions to (the problems of) the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Haiti is a distinct reality from the Dominican Republic." Applause.

His final leap went beyond the "failed states index" and any available evidence: "But if by chance, and we raise it only as a remote possibility, if the intention is that the Dominican Republic is a failed state to be occupied, let it be known that in no way would we permit the occupation of the Dominican Republic." Standing ovation -- in an audience included the United States Ambassador and representatives of the UN and international financial institutions, all remaining firmly in their seats. Since then, legislators, academics, news editors, opinion editorialists, and Catholic Cardinal Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez have picked up the banner.

Fernandez's declaration was read by many as anti-United-States bravado, a reference to the two U.S. interventions in the country during the 20th century. It was cheap ex tempore braggadocio and in itself won him little in this profoundly pro-U.S. country. The palace spokesman issued a damage-control clarification the following day: the President had in mind a possible intervention by a multilateral organization such as the United Nations. Some Dominicans wondered aloud whether Fernandez was beginning to echo the rhetoric of Venezuelan President Chavez. Former President Hipolito Mejia told the press that while he too rejected the "failed state" label for the Dominican Republic, the entire controversy over one journal article was overblown and Fernandez's raising the specter of foreign intervention was nonsensical ("un disparate").

Fernandez's remarks on Haiti - with subsequent official and press commentary - may have undone some of the good will earned by Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso during a visit to the leaders of the Interim Haitian Government on July 11. The day after Fernandez's remarks, Haitian Foreign Minister Herard Abraham, at a meeting of Caribbean states with EU representatives here, pointedly commented that the

international community generally favors joint development projects between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and that the Dominican-Haitian Mixed Commission had recently been reactivated for this purpose.

On July 18, the palace's public affairs manager Carlos Dore Cabral offered a more academic critique of the Foreign Policy article. Dore accused the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which publishes Foreign Policy, of having a right-wing and partisan bias. He said that because the study was based on media reports, its methodology was flawed, lacking in participant observation, in-depth interviews, and opinion surveys. Media sourcing distorted the results on some of the indicators for the Dominican Republic. The poorly defined indicator for emigration driven by instability unfairly lumped the country with others suffering from massive civil violence. Dore put a defensive third-world spin on the issue by repeating a canard that has been around since Balaguer's time: that the international community has a secret plan to unite the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Tough old socialist Euclides Gutierrez, senior in the government but without very much to do, recently alleged that this plot is designed to solve Haiti's problems while forcing the Hispanic side of the island to bear a disproportionate share of the burden.

Fernandez couldn't leave the topic alone. In his new Sunday interview program, July 24, he went over all 12 criteria used by the study, explaining why the results for the Dominican Republic were incorrect or misleading. This kept the discussion alive in the papers. One commentator in El Caribe acquainted herself with Foreign Policy magazine and told Dominican readers that they shouldn't feel specially singled out -- the journal had been even more harsh against the U.S. government and its policies in the Middle East.

Rafael Toribio, one of the leading thinkers at the USAID-supported NGO "Participacion Ciudadana," summarized the debate in an August 6 article titled, "Failed, Inefficient or Irresponsible." He reminded readers that the media soundings had been carried out in the worst moments of the 2003-2004 economic crisis. Even the strongest critics had admitted the existence of national problems related to the criteria and could lead to deterioration; and even a failed state is not subject to intervention unless it threatens vital interests of others. Many, including the President, had confused the notion of a "failed state" with that of a "failed government" -- in Toribio's opinion, the blame for a "failed state" lies not only with a government but with the political failures of an entire society. Privileged and ruling classes are particularly at fault.

And then Toribio put his finger directly on the wounds: more than 50% of Dominicans live in poverty, he wrote, and as many as a third of the population is in extreme poverty; at the same time, the country is marked by one of the highest disparities in income distribution in Latin America, "already the most unequal region of the world." Public services are abominable; a recent Gallup poll suggested that on average, Dominicans complete only the 5th grade and primary instruction averages only 2 hours and 37 minutes a day. Government expenditure on public health services and education is only half of what the law stipulates should be spent on education alone, and of that amount, 80 percent goes into salaries. Only with the arrival of the new millenium did the government manage to establish a system of social security and pensions, which still struggling. Of the active population, 16 percent are unemployed and 54 percent are working in the informal sector; 54 percent of the active workforce has no more education than four years of (Dominican!) primary school. Other problems are the uncertain supply of electricity, chronic since the 1970's; unquantified Haitian immigration and emigration of a million Dominicans; the growth of crime and violence; the delays of justice, extrajudicial killings, and five decades of growth that failed to achieve the potential of national endowments.

"Perhaps," he commented, "A state that has permitted such a situation has not yet failed -- but it stands accused, at a minimum, of being inefficient and irresponsible."

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell, Michael Meigs.

13. (U) This piece and others in our series can be consulted at our SIPRNET site <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> along with extensive other material.

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